L Dickson G-S (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bedouins MJ4

Birth of a Baby

Chap. X

A man cohabits with his wife until close on the birth of their child. As soon as the baby is born, however, the mother becomes "unclean" (*naqis* or *najis*) and the husband cannot go near her for forty days. This rule is carefully observed among all classes.

After a child is born, a very common method of treating the womb is to pack it with common salt. This is a very painful operation, and results in great suffering later, for a thickening of certain tissues supervenes, with disastrous consequences. The Mission hospital authorities in Kuwait and Bahrain are never tired of preaching the evil of the practice, but with little result.

After the birth of a child Bedawin women, and more especially Arab townswomen, resort to various drugs, etc., to reduce the size of the vagina to normal, or less than normal. This "pleases the husband", they say. Alum is the basic principal of the drugs employed. Zahwa, Shammari wife of 'Abdullah bin Mut'ab of the Abdu,* told me this in April 1931 on one of my wife's and my many visits.

Many women, having had two or three children, dread to have more, and my wife has frequently been asked both in the town and in the desert of Kuwait how they can prevent further conception. It is universally believed among them that European women know many methods of contraception, but are unwilling to divulge their secrets. Among Bedawin generally, if a woman has difficulty in bearing her child, a mare is brought in to her apartment or the portion of tent set apart for her; barley is then placed in her lap, and the mare is induced to eat. If the animal whinnies and eats, all is well, two or three rifle shots are fired at the same time, and the woman is then given strength to bring forth.

It sometimes happens that immediately after birth the mother becomes what the Bedawin call *mukhtabit* (mad), and unable to speak.† This is considered a very dangerous state, and according to them will result in death unless she can be induced to speak. In such situations also, a mare is hastily sent for and brought to the woman's side and offered barley from her lap. If the mare eats, the woman's tongue is loosed and her reason returns. If not, according to the common belief, the woman is sure to die.

On 20th February, 1933, in Kuwait, my own mare was borrowed

* Shammar tribe. † This aphasia is probably a form of hysteria.

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Averting Evil Eye

One A tribal shaikhs, on the other hand, usually content themselves with one wife. In Kuwait, for instance, the ruler's Queen is a lady of the Al Subah. She is never divorced—such a thing would be a disgrace to the family as a whole. She remains the Shaikhah always. She magnanimously, however, allows the Shaikh Ibn Subah to take three other tribal wives, to amuse himself with, and to change them as often as he likes, provided he does not bring them into the town of Kuwait itself. They must remain in the desert. In this way her pride is satisfied. She remains the Queen. Here is an object lesson to the West.

K 643 587

At the birth of a child to a Badawin mother, a dagger, piece of steel, or even a needle or bodkin, must be placed in the cot or attached to the clothes of the baby. The mother cannot move the child without this piece of metal going with it. Iron or steel, is the thing that counts. Gold, etc., will not do. The idea is that it wards off the Evil Eye. The custom is universal among the Mutair, Dhafir, Shammar, 'Ajman and 'Awazim tribes, and probably will be found to exist among all the desert tribes.

B 844 763

A woman is said to be *Admilo* or *Aadlo* when she is pregnant. She is said to have *waldder* or *shinf'ar* when the child is born. The term *shina* is always used for the unborn child.

B 843

CIRCUMCISION

Among the Badawin circumcision is performed when the boy is between three and a half and seven years.

B 304 762

The operation is usually done by one who has had previous practice. The day is looked upon as a family holiday, and according to a man's means, guests and neighbours are invited to a meal, best clothes are donned, and the womenfolk dance among themselves till a late hour, except the mother, who runs away (*tinkesh*) and hides herself. The boy is now a "proper Muslim".

The season for the circumcision ceremony is nearly always June (*al Sifari*) when the *kaus* or dry north-west wind is blowing. The wound is supposed to heal quickly then. If the sea is near by, the boy is encouraged to bathe, the salty nature of the water acting as an antiseptic.

Among some Badawin the feasting of guests and neighbours goes on for the number of days that the boy has years, i.e. if he is six years